

July 9, 1985 (updated Sept. 11, 1985)  
Strategic bombing chronology

1939 ..... 1939 ..... 1939 .....

Sept 1

World War II begins; roosevelt issues appeal to abstain from all-out air war (Kennett, 106) (get copy of text)

Sept 6

G.B. initiates air war vs. Germany; attacks naval units (Kennett, 110)

Sept 26

Germany retaliates with air strikes (against ?); both sides very careful to avoid hitting civilians (Kennett, 110)

Sept 27

Warsaw falls after intense bombardment

Dec

British Wellington bombers mauled in day anti-ship mission over North Sea (Sallagar, 38)

1940 ..... 1940 ..... 1940 .....

April 1940

BC given new directive to hit oil facilities in Germ

April 9

German forces occupy Denmark and invade Norway

May 10

Germany invades Netherlands, Belgium, and France; phony or twilight war ends; Churchill replaces Chamberlain

May 14

Rotterdam bombed by Germans (Kennett, 112) Brit gov't interprets attack as deliberately anti-civilian; "end of period of restraint in air war;" "gloves are off;" discussion of misunderstanding Sallagar, 45

May 15

G.B. launches night attack vs. Ruhr; "the beginning of a strategic air offensive that would last for 5 years" (Kennett, 112) French, fearing German reprisals against their vulnerable cities, are upset with Brits (ibid 113) (see also Quester, bargaining, p. 422)

May 26

evacuation of Dunkirk begins

May 28

Hitler orders Luftwaffe to attack Britain in reprisal for Ruhr attacks



1940

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June 11  
Italy joins war

June 17  
preliminary German attacks against Brit air bases

June-July  
British debate various ideas for how to wage war against Germany  
(Sallagar 58)

July-Aug  
BC hits German invasion ports in France

July 10  
German air attack on Brit coastal shipping

July 16  
Hitler issues SEALION directive; orders Goering to attain air superiority over Britain in preparation for a cross-channel invasion

Aug 1  
Hitler forbids "terror attacks" without his express permission; wants to hold the "lethal blow" for most auspicious moment, Sallagar 72

Aug 13--September: Battle of Britain  
"Eagle Day" Germany opens air offensive vs. GB, "Battle of Britain", lasts from August through September 1940. high losses during day raids prompts Luftwaffe to switch to night attacks; Kennett: this "meant the end of precision bombing;" "meant change to broader definition of objective and to area bombing". 117 Goering hits an inefficiently wide range of targets and then focusses on Brit air bases, with much greater effect

Aug 24  
German bombers accidentally bomb London; Churchill orders retaliatory raid against Germany (Kennett, 118)

Aug 25  
German bombers hit London; (Quester regards as a "conscious effort to bait Hitler into an immediate shifting of the Luftwaffe attack onto London, away from the RAF Fighter Command bases, which were beginning to collapse under the strain" [Quester, 428])

Aug 30  
Hitler orders Luftwaffe to use night bombing to attack Brit industry, trade, and transportation targets. Sallagar believes this is because it let Hitler out of the SEALION quandry and also let him shift forces to east in preparation for attack on Russia pp. 80-81

Sept 7, 1940  
the "Blitz" begins; reasons for shift in Overy, 34-5; see also Kennett, 119-123 for motives, lessons, tonnages, casualties; this shift takes pressure off fighter command in the nick of time, allowing

1940

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them to recoup; according to sallagar, "it was the start of indiscriminate air warfare...the end of the road to total war" p. 67

Sept 15  
air battles over GB reach climax; balance shifts in GB favor

Sept 17  
SEALION invasion postponed indefinitely (quester, 430)

also in Sept, Italy entered war, compelling GB to divert air resources from defending vs. Blitz; Brit resources stretched to limit (overy, 41)

Oct 30  
directive to BC to attack both economic and morale targets, explicitly includes area bombing, e.g. "giving the fires every chance to spread" (sallagar, 88-91; also SAOG, I, p. 157 for text of directive)

Oct 12  
Hitler cancels SEALION

Nov 14  
554 killed in bombing of Coventry

Nov 16  
1st photorecon flights reveal how ineffective "precision" bombing had been (Sallagar, 94)

Dec 16  
RAF bombs Mannheim in an "attack experimentally designed to influct maximum damage on a German town" ("with disappointing results") quester, 427)

1941 ..... 1941 ..... 1941 ..... 1941  
"watershed year" for air war; Germany had to fight two air wars--strategic in west and tactical in east (overy, 47, 50, 58); according to Frankland, the German invasion of Russia made it inevitable that B offensive would continue (the only way to help Russia) and the Butt report necessitated shift to area bombing, pp. 38-39)

mid-May  
German campaigns in Balkans and Eastern Europe divert forces from assault on Britain (quester, 431); end of "blitz"

summer of 41, Brit targeting shifted to morale, from oil to transportation, according to harris: "halfway between area and precision" see kennett, 128,  
esp. ft. 3

fiction of precision bombing persisted throughout much of 1941; as it eroded, open bombing of civilians became more accepted (sallagar, 97)

Blitz ends



1941

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Nov, 1940--Feb 1942

lull in air offensive (whose?) ) (Kennett, 129)

March

ABC-1 negotiations; first talks between US and GB combined air offensive in the event that US enters war (Overy 61)

March 9--July 9

also in March, oil directive cancelled; BC diverted to battle of Atlantic until early summer 1941 (Sallagar 98; Frankland, 32-3)

May

Germ assault tapers off (Quester, D, 136)

June 22

Germany invades Russia

July 9

new directive to BC--strike vs transport "in congested industrial areas" Sallagar 100-1 "it is clear that the new bombing policy, whatever its ostensible object, was only one small step removed from unrestrained area bombing" p. 101

Aug 18 1941

Butt Report showed how inaccurate bombing had been; stimulated research on navigation; convinced leaders that precision no longer feasible; area attacks necessary, but sufficient forces not available yet

Sept

US supplies bomber bases in Philippines in anticipation of war with Japan

Nov. 13

BC told to conserve its resources SAOG, I, 186-7: "results not worth casualties it was suffering" (Quester, D, 136; Sallagar, 103); 1941 "brought BC to nadir of its fortunes" Sallagar, 105

1942 ..... 1942 ..... 1942 .....

lull in European air war ends; new GB offensive

Feb 11 (14 according to Sallagar and Quester, D)

new directive to BC--"focussed on morale;" "dehousing;" deliberate targeting of cities (Kennett, 129) "for the first time a bombing directive had singled out civilian morale as the primary objective" (Sallagar, 110) "area" or "morale" bombing "now was to become a general policy, drawing the largest part of BC's tonnage from 1942 to 1945." (Quester, 432)

Feb 20

Harris becomes CoC of BC; his views: hit cities!; a staunch disciple of Trenchard (Kennett, 130, see ft. 4)

1942

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March

Cherwell memo on dehousing, SAOG, I, 331-5 (includes Tizard rebuttal)  
Sallagar, 111

March 8

GEE-blind bombing device-used for first time against Essen (Kennett, 131)

March 25-29

experiment with incendiary attack vs Lubeck; chosen for its flammability; great success--put BC back on map (Kennett, 132)

April 14

Germany, in reprisal for Lubeck, begins "Baedeker Raids" against Exeter and other scenic, historical British cities

April 18

45 Doolittle raid on Japan; 16 carrier based B-25s, little damage but great symbolic value; "opening round of strategic bombing war in Pacific" (Kennett, 163; also Quester D, 162)

May 30

"1000 Raid" vs Cologne (followed by 1000 raids on Essen and Bremen); dramatic experiment with concentrated attack; great public relations for BC (Kennett, 134) for stats on raid, see SAOG, I, 485-6; "air offensive entered all out phase, Sallagar 118)

Aug

Pathfinder forces come into existence

also in Aug, joint directive for combined bomber offensive (need more detail) Overy, 65

45 also in Aug, first US daylight raid (good discussion in Frankland, 51) *vs. French target*

Sept

45 1st flight of B-29

45 also in Sept, AWPD-42, plan for combined bomber offensive: US during day and GB at night, Wolk, 19

Dec

Oboe navigation aid available (Kennett, 135)

45 also in Dec, Committee of Operations Analysis considers targets (for US?) in Europe and Japan (Sallagar 164)

1943 ..... 1943 ..... 1943 ..... 1943

in 1943, Luftwaffe shifts from offense to defense; details on Kamhuber line (Kennett, 137-8); during 1943, Germany upgrades air defenses

second half of 1943, Allied offensive reaches impasse--little damage



and high losses; weather and improved German air defenses big factors (Kennett, 152); during 1943, only 1/3 Brit crews made it through a tour of 30 missions (Kennett, 182)

Jan

H2S available--airborne, earth-scanning radar

Jan 27

US 8th AF hits Germany for first time; daylight, unescorted attack on port at Wilhelmshaven (Kennett, 135)

Jan 14-24

Casablanca Conference and Directive; plans combined air offensive; decided that air supremacy over Germany was essential for land invasion; planned air war for duration in Europe; debate on how to conduct air war, e.g. what kinds of targets (over 73-75); at Casablanca, Ira Eaker argued that day and night raids complemented each other (Quester, d, 145); Roosevelt and Churchill decided that for the time being, the bomber offensive was the principal means of aiding Stalin (Calvocoressi, 496)

Jan 24-29

RAF incendiary attack against Hamburg

Jan 31

Russian victory at Stalingrad

March--July

Battle of Ruhr; 43 major raids (Kennett, 143)

June 10

POINTBLANK directive; combined operations officially underway; Brit hits cities "associated" with industries at night and US hits specific industries by day (Kennett, 145)

July 19

USAAF hits targets on edge of Rome; Churchill and Roosevelt disagree on policy of bombing Italy--goal coerce armistice from Badoglio government (Kennett, 150)

July 24-28

Battle of Hamburg; use of "window" disrupts German air defenses; first firestorm created night of July 27-8; 42,000 killed (Kennett, 146-8)

July-Aug

US day raids incur heavy losses (Kennett, 153)

Oct 9-14

"Black Week" for USAAF; high losses, e.g. Schweinfurt (20% losses) (Kennett, 153)

Nov 1

Arnold directed to hit area targets by radar when daylight precision

was not feasible (Schaeffer, 322)

November--until March 1944

beginning of Battle of Berlin; 16 major assaults; "a clear defeat for RAF" (Kennett, 154)

Dec 13

first long-range P-51 Mustangs in service

1944 ..... 1944 ..... 1944 ..... 1944

in early 1944, preparations were being made for Overlord; Pointblank secondary to Overlord demands (Kennett, 155); during this year, U.S. shifted to "blind bombing," i.e. area bombing (Kennett, 160-1) also, morale bombing, "war weary" scheme (Clarion ?)

Feb

US gets first P-51 escort fighters--drop in bomber crew casualties (Quester, 146)

April

US focuses air offensive to German oil supply

*all bombs put under IKS command*

June 6

Allied landings at Normandy

June 10

first German V-1 bomb attack on London

Feb-March

Allies attain air superiority over Europe (Wolk, 23)

March

US decides to conquer Marianas in order to obtain B-29 bases (Kennett, 167)

June 15-16

first B-29 raids on Japan; planes flew "over hump" from India to bases in China; 20th Air Force

July 18

Marines storm Saipan

Oct 12

first B-29s at Saipan's Isley Field

Late fall 1944

RAF considers Thunderclap massive terror raids against Germany; Spaatz rejects as immoral (Quester, 150)

Nov

US Committee of Operations analysts wanted to try incendiaries against Japan; General Hansell ordered to do it, but his "heart was not in it"



(Kennett, 169)

Nov 29-30

first B-29 raids against Tokyo; Hansell lost job because of lack of enthusiasm for fire bombing (Kennett, 169; see also Overy, 98-100)

1945

Jan

US abandons Chinese B-29 bases due to Japanese ground offensive

Jan 3-4

first full scale fire raid against Nagoya, despite Hansell's protests (Kennett, 169)

Jan 20

Hansell replaced by LeMay; Hansell's preference for precision cost him his job (Kennett, 169)

Feb 3

AAF raid on Berlin kills 25,000 people (Kennett, 161)

Feb 13

RAF "put torch to ~~Desden~~" (Kennett, 161)

Feb 22

operation CLARION in operation (Schaeffer, 331)

early March

LeMay shifts to fire (Kennett, 171)

March 3-4

massive fire raid against Tokyo--100,000 killed (Kennett, 170-5)  
[Kennett, 174-5, figures on tonnages for urban attacks]

May 7

German surrender

mid-June

AAF running out of targets after all major Japanese cities burned out (Kennett, 174)

Aug 6

Hiroshima

Aug 9

Nagasaki

Aug 11

Japanese surrender